

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** October 13, 2016

**Agenda Item:** Canyon Creek Wildlife Management Area Specimen Creek Donation (R3)

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Min

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### **Background**

FWP is seeking approval to acquire the Specimen Creek Property through donation. The addition would add approximately 729 acres of important wildlife habitat to the northern border of the Canyon Creek Wildlife Management Area. Its primary goal is to expand wildlife habitat and further protect a stream corridor containing native westslope cutthroat trout, while maintaining public access to public lands in a strategic location. This parcel, like the existing Canyon Creek WMA, provides hunting opportunity for mule deer and elk, winter range for mule deer and moose, and spring, summer and fall range for all three of these big game species. In addition, the entire suite of carnivores, grizzly and black bear, wolves, Canada lynx, wolverine, bobcat, etc., utilize the area, and this parcel falls within the continental divide wildlife movement corridor between the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) and areas further south.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

FWP has worked with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation on this proposed project. FWP has completed both a 30-day scoping period and a 30-day public comment period on the draft EA. A public hearing was held on September 1<sup>st</sup>. In coordination with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's efforts to assemble funding for this project, additional opportunity for public participation occurred last fall (2015), when the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust issued a request for public comment, and public participation was also afforded in early summer 2016 as part of the application process for funding through the Lewis and Clark County Open Lands Program (30-day comment period followed by a public hearing).

Specific to FWP's public review process, four people signed in at the public hearing in Helena. All four individuals were neighboring landowners and were in support of the proposal and offered specific suggestions for FWP to consider. Eight comments were received from individuals or parties via email and regular mail during the public comment period. A total of seven individuals and organizations indicated support for FWP to accept the donation of the property as an addition to the Canyon Creek WMA. No one registered opposition to FWP acquiring the property, and one individual commented without giving a clear opinion for or against the proposal.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

FWP prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate the proposed action and alternatives. The EA considered accepting the Specimen Creek addition and alternatively to not accept the property. Because of the fish and wildlife habitat values, adjacency to the WMA, threat of subdivision and development, tie to other conserved lands, and recreational values associated with the property, a Decision Notice was rendered recommending acceptance of this addition to the Canyon Creek WMA.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends that the Commission approve acceptance of the Specimen Creek Addition to the Canyon Creek WMA. This property would expand and enhance important habitat for a variety of wildlife and fisheries resources and enhance hunter opportunity within the WMA and adjacent USFS properties.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve the Specimen Creek donated addition to Canyon Creek WMA.